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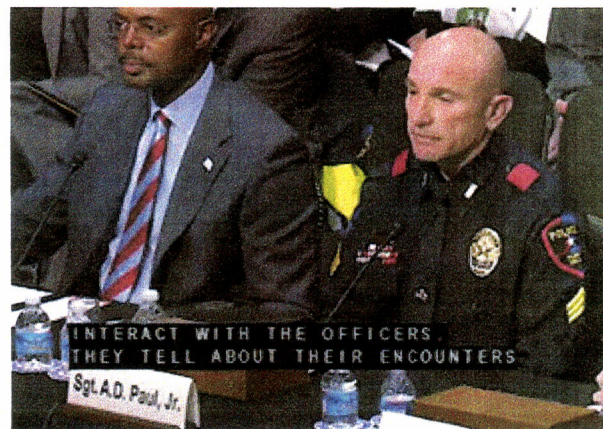
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## Talking CIT and NAMI on Capitol Hill

By Laura Usher, NAMI CIT Program Manager

Testifying before Congress can be a nerve-wracking experience. For NAMI member and police officer A.D. Paul, the challenge was telling his story in less than five minutes. Sgt. Paul is with the Plano, Texas Police Department and is helping to lead Texas' efforts to expand crisis intervention teams (CIT), the program that brings together NAMI Affiliates, police and mental health providers to improve the way that communities respond to mental health crisis situations.

He spoke before the **Senate Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights** about how Plano's CIT program trains officers and partners with the community. After that, he spent a long afternoon talking with his members of Congress about CIT and NAMI.



Sgt. Paul testifying before Congress in April 2014. Photo: Video still from **U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary**

**Q: What was it like to testify before a Congressional committee? Compared your day-to-day work, this must have been a piece of cake.**

*It was a real honor and privilege. To tell the truth it was the most stressful testimony I'd ever given. I must have practiced my oral testimony 20 times and still I messed it up. It was also very sobering because part of the hearing centered on the death of Ethan Saylor while in police custody.*

**Q: You met with Senator Ted Cruz and Congressman Sam Johnson. What was it like to be in the same room with your elected officials?**

*I was taken aback by how comfortable they made me feel. I was excited that both were interested in crisis intervention teams and how to expand CIT throughout the country. Maybe it was a Texas thing, but I felt at home and free to speak.*

**Q: Why do you think it's so important for police to speak out about mental health issues?**

*Whether law enforcement likes it or not, we have become the first clinician on the road to recovery for many suffering from mental illness and developmental delays. We also know that the better job we do of handling these crisis calls the safer all in the community will be. Law enforcement is still respected in our society and anytime we can influence public debate for the good of society, I feel we have a duty to do so.*

**Q: What was the most important message you shared with your members of Congress?**

*Not only can CIT improve the lives of people living with mental illness it can also make better police officers and police departments.*

**Q: Do have any advice for someone who has never spoken with a legislator? How do you make sure to get your message across?**

*Be very comfortable with the subject matter and message you want to relay. Also speak as if you're talking to your best friend and don't be afraid to show your passion!*

*Dr. Fred Frese gave me some great advice prior to my testimony. He said, "Whatever you do don't go over five minutes." As far as my advice, practice, practice and practice. I've gone to the state legislature with leaders from my local NAMI Affiliate here in Collin County, Texas and that helped me prepare for my testimony. And I was just joking about the "donut" part in my statement, they always have great food!*

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